From Sovereignty to Omniscience
Digital Theology as Political Theology of the Digital

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To complement existing definitions of Digital Theology, the article proposes a Political Theology of the Digital. It traces the conceptual development of Political Theology from a specific interest in sovereignty to a broader understanding as conceptual analysis and theorization of power through a theological lens. The proposed Political Theology of the Digital investigates structural homologies and conceptual exchanges between the two fields with specific attention to the power dynamics engendered by technological and societal transformations. Drawing on the doctrine of God, it sketches a fourfold account of disciplining, performing, controlling, and replicating omniscience to conceptualize aspects of digital surveillance, social media culture, data capitalism, and predictive reification.

1. Defining Digital Theology?

"Theologies of the Digital" is the topic of our collective thought process here. When we started this discussion a couple of years ago, we wondered: "What, if anything, can theology as a discipline contribute to the analysis, conceptualization and assessment of the emergent logics of 'the digital'? And how are theological concepts and topics themselves transformed by 'the digital'?"[1] There was no shared definition (yet) of "the digital" or of what the genitive "theologies of the digital" should mean. We instead

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[1] Reichel and van Oorschot 2019.

started by looking at some particular themes and sites that seemed subject to significant transformation in the digital age–understandings of the human person, freedom, knowledge, and scripture–and moved to demonstrate that, indeed, theological reflection had much to contribute to think through some of these transformations.

As we discussed these concrete topics and sites of transformations, more themes emerged: additional sites of transformation (media/lity, community, subalternity) as well as more subcutaneous questions that seemed to run across the individual topics: the functioning of power and our very understanding of reality. As the questions become more fundamental, a more fundamental self-reflection may also be order: What is digital theology? How should it conceive of its own task, its role, its contribution in the midst of such deep transformations?

In their seminal 2019 article, Peter Phillips, Kyle Schiefelbein-Guerrero, and Jonas Kurlberg took a stab at "Defining Digital Theology."[2] The article gives a wonderful overview over the breadth of theological conversations in relation to digitality. Taking a "big tent" approach to the field, it typologizes four different approaches that can be found and distinguished under the banner of "digital theology" as DT1—DT4.

Across all four of them, "Digital theology" is mainly conceptualized as a spin-off to "Digital Humanities"[3] and in parallel to "Digital religion"[4]: Digital theology, thus, is thus primarily understood as the discipline-specific participation in developments generally pertinent to Digital Humanities, as well as the discipline's reflection on the ensuing transformation of its practice, research and teaching.

This is not surprising, as it most likely simply accurately reflects the way "the digital" has come into view for theology: First as computational tools to be used (DT1); secondarily, necessitating reflection on how such use impacts and transforms the practices that incorporate them (DT2); subsequently finding that digital developments occasionally raise new (or variations of) theological questions (DT3); and finally, as an area of what the researchers call "theological-ethical critique of digitality," (39) or, with somewhat more pathos, "prophetic appraisals of digital culture" (DT4, 40). These four meanings of "digital theology" are developed partially, if not completely in parallel with the four "waves" of Digital Religion, which outline a methodological progression and maturation rather than a mere chronology. This typology skillfully demon-

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[2] Phillips et al. 2019.

[3] Anderson 2018.

[4] See Heidi Campbell's seminal work, Campbell 2013; Campbell and Altenhofen 2015.

strates the breadth of the work being done to date and elucidates the specific shape and features of the emergent field.

What is curiously absent in this typology–and this is not a critique of the article, but merely an observation pertaining to the material it organizes–what is curiously absent in digital theology as it presents itself to date, then, is a species of digital theology that undertakes something like a conceptual analysis and theorization of digitality through a theological lens, with specific attention to the power dynamics engendered by its technological and societal transformations. In other words, a political theology of the digital.

Larger transformations of power–not just who has it, or if it is or isn't put to good use, but how power is even constituted, how it circulates, and in what effects it manifests and reifies itself—are indeed one of the most salient features of the digital age. They are themselves in need of theorization, beyond a focus on the use of specific technologies or their practical and ethical assessment. Since theologians have centuries of experience in conceptualizing superhuman power, we might thus not *only* ask ourselves what digitality can do for *us*—e.g., support our research, transform our teaching, and transform ministerial practice in interesting ways—, but what *we* can do for digitality: provide an analytic lens and conceptual models for theorizing its particular logics.

In this article, I thus want to propose and motivate a much-needed complement to the landscape so far: digital theology as a political theology of the digital. Given that the term political theology is itself used in a variety of different ways, I will first draw out further what I mean by political theology as a specific mode of power analysis, and what benefit I see this mode of analysis to have yielded historically *both* for political theory *and* for theology. I will then propose an expansion into digital theology and sketch a few conceptual mappings such a lens may produce.

2. Political Theology

2.1 Power Between Political Theory and Doctrine of God

Power is a central notion in the Christian doctrine of God. In creeds and in liturgical expressions, in reference and prayerful address, "The Almighty" functions almost as a synonym for the Christian God. Theology, in its central task to systematize, assess, and guide the church's proclamation of God, has thus always been occupied with conceptualizing divine power.

Power is of course equally eminent in the political sphere. Whether "the political" is defined more systemically (with regard to institutions of the state), more functionally (with regard to practices of government), or more agonistically (as conflictual dynamics), power is an equally central dimension of it. Indeed in many discourses, "power dynamics" functions almost as a synonym for understanding something as political.

We might thus tentatively define both "the political" and "the theological" in terms of their dealing with power: The theological conceptualizes higher powers engendering, conditioning, and affecting our reality as a whole, while the political deals with rivaling claims and contestations of power within the creaturely realm, and devises norms, structures, and institutions to negotiate them. Since power is central both to doctrine of God and political theory, there is thus a certain semantic overlap, there is a certain conceptual overlap, and there are certain grammatical overlaps in the theorization of power between these two areas of thought.

Now, God is not the state, and the state is not God. God's sovereignty and the sovereignty of nation states, God's providence and political governance, God's relation to creation and power dynamics within the world, are not one and the same thing. The political, then, is not the theological, and the theological is not the political. But clearly, the theological is political, and the political is theological. Since the human mind is finite and areas of thought cannot neatly be compartmentalized even *if* one believed that their subjects were disjunct, it is unsurprising that conceptions and ideas have tended to migrate between these two realms of reflection to inform one another, also creating significant historical discursive overlaps. Their respective notions may structurally mimic one another, sometimes even explicitly invoke one another when doing so, and questions that arise in theorizing the one most often arise in theorizing the other.

Carl Schmitt retrieved the term *political theology* for the genealogical and systematic investigation of concept migration between the two realms, or what he called "a sociology of concepts."[5] This mode of analysis became as generative as it became contentious in the 20th century and until today. In this enterprise, what we may call the "theo-political hyphen" has cut both ways–to legitimate or to challenge specific political notions on doctrinal grounds as well as to legitimate or to challenge specific theological notions in light of political commitments. Thus a certain complexity of cross-pollination or mutual historical influence, as well as mutual analysis and evaluative assessment has marked the political-theological project.

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[5] Schmitt 2005.

Even as many definitions circulate, I have found Adam Kotsko's to be a helpful shorthand for my own approach. Against narrowly understandings political theology either as a politically invested theologizing or a theologically committed politics, Kotsko proposes that the object of study in political theology in fact is "*the very relationship between politics and theology*, centering on structural homologies and conceptual exchanges between the two fields."[6] This definition then locates political theology proper on a meta-level with regard to both politicized theology and theologically funded politics, seeing them as its objects of reflection and theorization.

It is important to clarify that such a meta-perspective does not make political theology neutral in any way. Rarely has political theology functioned as a purely descriptive, historical, systematic undertaking. Since its authors—whether political theorists or theologians—would typically hold commitments in one or the other realm (at least), their political-theological analysis would explicitly or implicitly mount arguments about the legitimacy or even necessity of specific conceptions and shapes of power, or of their religiously heretical and dangerous character. Even the mere postulate of the theo-political connection typically either served to legitimate or to discredit the concepts thus traced as theological, depending on the standpoint of the analyst.

Beyond the struggle for genealogical supremacy or conceptual authority, divine power and human power came also into more direct competition and thus need for theo-political negotiation and adjudication especially where either side stipulated an ontology of power, its highest form, or its origin. In that case questions would arise like, how does "the Almighty" relate to "the Mighty," or, how does the state's monopoly on violence replace, or continue to depend on, higher powers? Thus, political theology has indeed also been *theological* in the sense of adjudicating ultimate beliefs.

2.2 Sovereignty as Site of Theo-Political Investigation

Historically, the most prominent site of engagement for such competitive "political theology" became the notion of sovereignty. Legal theorist Jean Bodin defined sovereignty as "the most high, absolute, and perpetuall power ... to command."[7] Sovereignty became the central notion of the modern nation state even as it theologically had long served to define God's absolute authority and providential control over creation. It marked the political aspiration for absolute power and the site of struggle between secular and religious political theologies.

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[6] Kotsko 2021.
[7] Bodin 1962.

The 20th century witnessed unprecedented manifestations of sovereign power, in the political realm and beyond. Totalitarian ideologies and regimes strove to establish absolute and perpetual power over all areas of human life into all-encompassing control. The development of science and technology, of bureaucratic and administrative apparatuses, of information and communication technologies further helped to enforce those claims: from poison gas to the atomic bomb, from mass media to the concentration camp, as well as to the elaborate forms of biopolitics which have since been found to regulate not only totalitarian regimes but also liberal democracies. National states struggled to rise to sovereignty—only to see it challenged and threatened again: externally, by the growth of transnational political institutions, supranational corporations, and global dependencies; internally, by the noise of political revolutions as well as through the gradual erosion of liberal democracy. Colonized peoples fought for independence against systems of oppression and for the reinvention of their histories and identities. Technological progress evolved from instrumental tools to previously unimaginable degrees of shaping and transforming minds and bodies, human forms of life and even the literal face of the earth.

Political theology mined such developments for their conceptual structures, drawing out homologies or genealogies with regard to the sovereignty of God and its different conceptualizations, thus explicating implicit or latent theologies in diverse theorizations of political formations. Despite its "meta" approach, it actively participated in the politics of ideas by way of analysis. Carl Schmitt criticized legal positivism and constitutional democracy on grounds of their theological deism. Erik Peterson in turn denounced Schmitt's decisionism as heretical imperial monotheism, and denied the viability of any political theology on the basis of Christian trinitarianism.[8] Sharing Peterson denunciation of political monarchical monotheism, Juergen Moltmann would however develop a "new"–countercultural–political theology out of Trinitarian theology.[9] In Nazi Germany, the Lutheran doctrine of two kingdoms and the postulate of the lordship of Christ famously advanced competing understanding of divine sovereignty sponsoring different political theologies. In South Africa, a similar struggle ensued between Kuyperian beliefs of sphere sovereignty based on common grace, and anti-apartheid foregrounding of universal reconciliation in Christ.

These are obviously just a few examples of how the analysis of conceptual exchanges and structural homologies between the political and the theological time and again competed fiercely, and engendered normative conclusions. Since sovereignty invari-

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[8] Peterson 2011.

[9] Moltmann 1993.

ably gestures toward ultimate dimensions, it not only prompted struggle between different conceptualizations of "superhuman power," but also struggle for supremacy between the respective ultimate authorities of the two participant fields.

For the political theorist, the lens of political theology provided helpful resources for conceptualization and analysis, and of course, depending on the theorists own commitments, for their critique and reeinvisioning. For the theologian, too, the real-life manifestations of sovereignty in all their haunting ambivalence and full-blown horror led them to internal critique and reenvisioning of sovereignty as a central category in the doctrine of God.

2.3 Reconsidering Sovereignty, Theologically

Thus theologians started feeling the need to revise their theology, either nuancing the doctrine of sovereignty in counterdistinction of its real-life manifestations, or even dismissing it altogether as an adequate characterization of the Christian God. They asked themselves, if perfectly organized totalitarianism, bureaucratically administered genocide, and technologically advanced and medially glorified "total war" was what sovereign power looked like–was sovereignty then the best category to theorize *divine* power in the first place?

In the political-theological struggle, it became quite clear that theological nuance mattered: Different political positions resonated with different theological lenses, and that differing theological conceptions came to quite different political conclusions. After political theology and its manifestations "on the ground," theologians understood that a more qualitative discernment was necessary to describe "which God" we are talking about, rather than simply conceptually maximizing political forms of power or philosophical omni-quantors. Post WWII, then, alternative conceptions and re-framings of divine power mushroomed—ranging from the "suffering God" envisioned by Bonhoeffer, through the solidarity of God with the poor and marginalized formulated by liberation theologians, to the "death of God" and "weakness of God" proposed by postmodern theologians.

In their different ways, they all drew theological conclusions from political theology, qualitatively reformulating divine power in a way that would honor central Christian commitments while avoiding confusion with the very ungodly real-life manifestations of sovereignty.

2.4 From Political Theology to Economic Theology

In recent decades, political theology has expanded its scope to pursue similar questions–which theological notions implicitly fund the way power is conceptualized?–in other areas of life. Because, of course, power is operative far beyond "the political" in the narrower sense of its institutional realm–beyond the state and its legal and pre-legal foundations, beyond political systems and models of governance, beyond nationhood, the rule of law, civil religion and the like.

In his famous study, *The Kingdom and the Glory*[10], Giorgio Agamben suggests to complement the Schmittian political theology of sovereignty with an economic theology of government. Behind economic beliefs in the invisible hand of the market, bureaucratic procedure and protocols, and media and celebrity culture, Agamben discerns theological notions. These go beyond the traditional focus on sovereignty without replacing them: indeed, the theological lens is what allows to to tie them together and to make sense of the curious phenomenon that in modern societies power seems to need glory: economic administration of power and medial acclamation are the "angelic" modes through which the absent transcendent sovereign God enacts God's power providentially and is recognized. Where a secular analysis of economy and media might see in them democratic and liberal mechanisms, Agamben's economic theology reveals them to continue to be centered around the empty throne of sovereign power.

Agamben's economic theology presents a double expansion of political theology. For one, it moves beyond institutions of political power (the state, the constitution, the law) and into other subsystems of life (the economy, media)–hence, the predicate "economic" rather than "political." Additionally, it also expands the theological range of conceptions. Rather than parsing out the doctrine of *de deo uno*, and theological notions of creation, miracle, judgment, it parses out the doctrine of *de deo trino*, and theological notions of providence, angelology, liturgy.

Despite the expansions and the self-description, Agamben's analysis is structurally still squarely political theology: It traces structural homologies of secular power relations to theological notions, and parses out the theological structure systematically to better understand their real-life effects. Even more, it explicitly traces a genealogy of concepts from a seemingly secular site of power relations to a theological origin. If Erik Peterson had maintained against Carl Schmitt that a Trinitarian understanding of divine

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[10] Agamben 2011.

power would make any political theology impossible, Agamben's reveals that Trinitarian theology very much funds a political theology of economy.

3. Digital Theology–A Proposal

3.1 Digital Theology as a Political Theology of the Digital

In a similarly expansive vein, I thus propose digital theology as a political theology of the digital. Such a digital theology would inquire into *the very relationship between theology and the digital*, centering on structural homologies and conceptual exchanges between the two fields. In contrast or complement to the four types of digital theology sketched at the outset of this paper, it would neither describe theology operating in digitized modes (roughly Phillips et al.'s DT1+DT2) nor theological responses to digital issues (roughly Phillip's et al.'s DT3+DT4). Rather, all four of these direct ways of relating theologically to digitality would be among its objects of study.

As in other variations of political theology, the main focus of analysis would be a theorization of power. This is indeed demanded by the radical transformations of power that the digital heralds. Here, again, I do not primarily mean shifts in *who holds* the power (say, shifts from nation states to global tech corporations like Apple, Alphabet, Facebook, Amazon) or whether certain *uses* of it are more or less problematic (say, empowerment of resistance movements by social media or use of browsing meta-data in algorithmic micro-targeting). Instead, I am interested to investigate the ways in which power in the digital world has assumed the form of information technologies, and how it is constituted and circulates in forms of referentiality, communal voluntaricity, and algorithmicity[11]. If Agamben discerned a central inoperativity of power in the governmental machine, the regime of knowledge that is the digital comes with a further *desubjectivation and automaticity of power* that we need to understand better. If Agamben's economic theology interrogates the administrative and medialized shape of the governmental machine in the West asking, why does power need glory?, the focal question of a digital theology will be, why does power need knowledge? Theologically speaking, if the 20th century demanded a political theology of sovereignty, the 21st century demands a political theology of omniscience.

As in traditional political theology, the theologian of the digital must perform a double movement: Firstly, they will investigate conceptual exchanges and structural homologies between notions of divine omniscience and the digital, discerning latent

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[11] Stalder 2018.

theologies–this is their analytic or conceptual task. While many debates of digitality to date anecdotally invoke religious metaphors and tropes–from the "all-seeing eye" to enthusiastic or dystopian characterizations of "dataism"–, serious political-theological analysis of the digital is hard to find. The sophisticated conceptualizations of divine omniscience theologians have developed over centuries can offer helpful intellectual resources for a more finegrained analysis of how power/knowledge operates in the digital. It may even turn out that some are not only systematically, but even genealogically relevant. As in the earlier political theology sketched above, theological nuance will matter matter in its contribution to a fine-grained theorizations of the digital. What specific doctrines of omniscience do we see operative in the digital and how? What are their systematic ramifications?

While such political-theological analysis will also feed substantively into the theological-ethical critique of digitality Phillips et al. frame as DT4, this is not the only critical task that arises. Additionally, a theological self-critique in light of political theology's analysis of the digital will challenge theology's own articulations: If this is what manifestations of superhuman knowledge look like, the digital theologian must ask after their conceptual analysis, how then might we want to reconceive of divine omniscience in contradistinction from it, or even search for alternative notions altogether?

3.2 Power/Knowledge Beyond Sovereignty

The political theologies of sovereignty understood power as something a subject (a person or institution) possesses and wields–a notion that lends itself to questions about its true origin or its teleological destillation into a singular will or body, whether of God, or the monarch, or the people. It is obvious that power in the digital is much more liquid, depersonalized, and elusive in its datafied and algorithmic invisibility.

Agamben's economic theology homed in on the administrative functioning of power and its media apparatus. Guy Debord describes the "society of the spectacle"[12] as an autocratic reign of the market economy through capitalism-driven media, advertising, television, film and celebrity culture. The spectacle reduces reality to commodifiable fragments, encourages a focus on appearances, and alters behavior into patterns of conformity and consumption. It medially manufactures consent by way of acclamation that marks liberal democratic forms of government while also highly streamlining

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[12] Debord 1983.

behavior and consumer choice. All of these characterizations are only intensified in the digital society of the spectacle. But they may not be its only traits.

Our digital theology needs to go a step further by addressing not only the administration of power by market and media, but the minute technologies that today form the background mechanisms for such functioning of power: the datafication, computation, algorithmization at work in digital information and communication technologies.

Michel Foucault famously theorized a trend away from the centralized functioning of power in sovereignty in our Western societies, toward more capillary functionings of power through technologies that co-constituted power and knowledge. Foucault cautioned: "We should direct our researches on the nature of power not towards the juridical edifice of sovereignty, the State apparatuses and the ideologies which accompany them, but towards domination and the material operators of power, towards the forms of subjection and the inflections and utilizations of their localised systems, and towards strategic apparatuses. We must eschew the model of Leviathan in the study of power. We must escape from the limited field of juridical sovereignty and State institutions, and instead base our analysis of power on the study of the techniques and tactics of domination."[13]

Michel Foucault thus developed a depersonalized account of power, in which power is not seen as a commodity that can be possessed, but as something that "circulates … and [is] exercised thorough a net-like organization" (98). Foucault discerns power from effects rather than intentions, and locates it in mechanisms, procedures, and technologies rather than in subjects, roles, and positions. Power has to do with the machine rather than its operator, in how it structures the field of possible action. It distends into the micropractices of everyday life in all its minute mundane details.

This reconceptualization of power allows for a broader political-theological analysis beyond its personal ("the sovereign") and institutional ("the state") sites. It allows to capture the productive rather than merely prohibitive or repressive, the ordering and organizing rather than merely confining functioning of power. Instead of sovereignty's top-down approach, Foucault calls for an "ascending analysis" (99) of the "manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body" (95). Such an analysis starts with technologies of knowledge that are "both relatively autonomous of power and act as its infinitesimal elements." (99)

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[13] Foucault 1980: 102.

Indeed, technologies of knowledge production are central to this understanding of power itself. Rather than merely think of knowledge as something that leads to power or a more efficient application of power, Foucault conceptualizes power as producing its own knowledge, through its very mechanations and technologies, and thus reifies itself through the discourse of truth it generates, normalizes, and naturalizes. Foucault understands power and knowledge to be co-constitutive: "Power, when it is exercised through these subtle mechanisms, cannot but evolve, organise and put into circulation a knowledge, or rather apparatuses of knowledge" (102).

It is easy to see in the digital such an apparatus of power/knowledge—a decentralized, liquid, capillary, and ubiquitous technology that produces a certain kind of knowledge along with its own standards of truth, which in turn inconspicuously structure the field of power relations in invisible, depersonalized, apparently automatic and objective ways.

Understanding such digital power/knowledge better is then the distinct task of a new digital theology, a political theology of the digital. What structural homologies and conceptual influences between the theological's and the digital's notions of power/knowledge come into view? A full analysis is obviously far beyond the scope of this article, but a rough sketch will suffice to suggest the generative nature of such an inquiry: At least four variations on divine omniscience assert themselves in aspects of the digital economy. They do not indicate a progress or succession of models, but distinguish theological parallels in different paradigmatic aspects of the digital technology that exist simultaneously.

3.3 Omniscience as Site of Theo-Political Investigation

Disciplining omniscience: A digital theology of eschatology. Taking another cue from Foucault, what we might call *disciplining omniscience comes into view*. His study of the prison has become a seminal text for the formation of surveillance studies, and thus presents an important entry for the digital theology envisioned here. For Foucault, the panopticon—Jeremy Bentham's famous translation of the "all-seeing eye of God" into a functional architecture—marked the technological transition from societies of sovereignty to what he called societies of discipline.

Where sovereignty relies on physical force, discipline internalizes its regime in apparently more humane, but also highly pervasive and inescapable ways. While visibility is central to both, its relation is inversed between them. Sovereign power makes the body of the king highly visible to the gaze of the masses in order to be able to exercise power

over life and death from a central location, while the masses themselves remain in the shadows. In the societies of discipline, the individual is exposed to permanent visibility by a central site of power which itself remains shrouded and intransparent. The knowledge that one may be watched at any time effects a preemptive self-regulation on the side of those being watched.

"Visibility is a trap,"[14] observes Foucault: The masses' visibility becomes the instrument of their subjection–which at the same time also effects their subjectification, their becoming subjects through the technologically engendered self-consciousness of their conduct. The mystery of the technology structures space and time such that visibility creates knowledge, which in effect disciplines behavior and produces reflective subjects without any apparent intervention or application of force. Power does thus not rely on the existence or presence of a sovereign subject, force and intervention, or even on glory and acclamation—but on knowledge: a technological apparatus that exposes everything to the scrutinizing, controlling, and correcting gaze of power. Power comes from everywhere and nowhere, permeates everything, and is exerted in automatic and depersonalized regimes of knowledge.

Even as the panopticon seems to be about physical enclosure, Foucault points out insightfully that its governing principle does not primarily target the body, but the soul: it is a "machine for altering minds." (125) It is thus not surprising to find the disciplining mechanisms of the panopticon to apply even as it has shed its walls and gone virtual, relying on data rather than architecture, and on means of tracking far beyond literal visibility.

Already Bentham had envisioned "the gradual adoption and diversified application of this single principle...over the face of civilized society" to the benefit of "morals reformed, health preserved, industry invigorated, instruction diffused, public burdens lightened, economy seated as it were upon a rock, the gordian knot of the poor-laws not cut but untied–all by a simple idea in architecture."[15] To date, find disciplining omniscience at work in digitized forms of policing and law enforcement, in the ever more competitive data-driven education system, and in the workplace: Just think of current debates about the meticulous surveillance of Amazon delivery drivers and warehouse employees which brutally disciplines their conduct into maximal efficiency.

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[14] Foucault 1995.
[15] Bentham 1995: 95.

The theology of disciplining omniscience is not hard to trace, and indeed this is the area of digital theology that has seen the most explicit engagement.[16] The disciplining mechanism relies on the assumption of a divine power that inescapably records and eschatologically judges human actions. The all-seeing eye of God remains invisible, shrouded in mystery, but watches everything. Conscience is shaped by an envisioned final judgment seat: the *knowledge that someone knows what I am doing* delegates behavioral discipline to the subject, who conforms to normative expectations in order to avoid negative consequences. Bentham himself explicitly epigraphed his panoptic proposal with a verse from Psalm 139 and commissioned an emblem for his panopticon which shows an all-seeing eye at the center, a classical symbol of the divine, sending its illuminating rays into the cells which are organized around it at the periphery, captioned with three principles: "mercy, justice, vigilance," as variations on the attributes of God.

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[16] Cf. especially the work of Eric Stoddart.

Drawing on implicit theological notions elucidates the curious paradox of the digital economy that discipline does not formally deny or even limit human freedom—centuries of theological debates substantiate it as indeed absolutely necessary for the functioning of an eschatological disciplinary mechanism. The perception of individual freedom is in fact an effect of the disciplinary apparatus: the self-reflection engendered by surveillance and the subsequent ability to conduct oneself indeed mark the freedom of the individual by way of subjectification. Rather than present an archaic notion of a judging God, disciplining omniscience can thus be found at the core modernity's understanding of God as vehicle of morality. The inversion of visibility from God to humanity thus does not relinquish power, but in fact allows it to permeate into the most remote corners of human conduct as a productive rather than repressive function.

Performing omniscience: A digital theology of election. What I want to call performing omniscience is in some ways an intensification, in other ways an inversion of the disciplining omniscience type. In the digital panopticon, the center of power is not just intransparent, it vanishes from view or even disperses altogether. But counterintuitively, this does not seem to result in emancipation from discipline's heteronomy. Instead, the ensuing question "what if no one is watching?" leads to existential anxiety and performative self-production. If self-consciousness, a fear of punishment, or a shame of exposure marked disciplining omniscience, the driving force of performing omniscience is an insatiable desire to be seen.

Performing omniscience is at work in the exhibitionism of social media culture, populated by "selfies," "foodies," etc., and in self-tracking apps and practices.[17] The technologies of knowledge here are no external impositions, but rather lure the individual into exposing itself in ever increasing visibility and availability. "Self-knowledge through numbers" (the Quantified Self's slogan) as well as the resonances on social media provide ever-precarious self-affirmation, as actual self-perfection or self-achievement remains impossible: "A hundred years ago 'to be modern' meant to chase 'the final state of perfection'–now it means an infinity of improvement, with no 'final state' in sight and none desired."[18] The urge to performatively establish one's truth, one's self, one's status, recasts individuala as "commodities: that is, as products capable of drawing attention."[19] In absence of a clearly defined big Other, the subjectification mechanism cannot be completed. Affirmation from small others comes to

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[17] Cf. esp. the work of Deborah Lupton.

[18] Bauman 2012: viii-ix.

[19] Bauman / Lyon 2013: 31.

function as a proxy in what can now be conceptualized as horizontal or lateral surveillance[20], to whose shifting and intransparent norms and expectations the individual keeps subjecting itself, unable to attain the closure of recognition once and for all. The implicit theology obviously draws on ascetic ideas and religious practices, but these are theologically quite distinct from the discipline described in the previous type. The theological corollary is not the function of divine omniscience in eternal judgment, but its function in the doctrine of *election*. Its main drive is not fear of retribution, but anxiety about one's status in light of one's own inability to to secure it oneself. Salvation is never certain, it can only be inferred indirectly from its resonances and effects in one's own life, actions, and successes. But it remains precarious, out of reach of the performing subject, which is precisely the reason why the mechanism becomes so pervasive. Performing omniscience can thus best be theorized through the Calvinist *syllogismus practicus*. The insistence on the sovereign grace of God, which promises absolute freedom, in actuality leads to absolute existential uncertainty and a proliferation of "oughts"—engendering a "Weber 4.0" productivity.

Controlling omniscience: A digital theology of providence. In their remembrance of this empty center of power, disciplining and performing omniscience works through the subject's consciousness or even desire of its being-seen and being-tracked. But obviously much of the digital economy's working of power bypasses the subject and its conscious engagement altogether. This is the case in the algorithmic functioning of controlling omniscience. In his famous post-script to Foucault's societies of discipline, Gilles Deleuze questioned whether in fact a further transition was already underway, the emergence of societies of control in which the individual has been technologically fragmented into "dividual" data: Power "runs through each, dividing each within."[21] "The numerical language of control is made of codes that mark access to information, or reject it. … Individuals have become 'dividuals' and masses [have become] samples, data, markets, or 'banks.' "[22]

In the digital economy, data is most often produced without the individual's awareness. In her dystopic study of Surveillance Captitalism, Shoshana Zuboff describes how the entire world's actions and conditions are technologically "rendered as behavior, translated into electronic data flows."[23]

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[20] Lyon 2018.
[21] Deleuze 1992: 5.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Zuboff 2019: 211.

If disciplining omniscience's central principle relied on the individual's awareness of being watched, controlling omniscience works independent of it altogether. The individual moves, behaves and takes decisions under the impression of subjective freedom, while subtle mechanisms shape perception and decision-making through background mechanisms. Behavioral (and other) data flows are technologically analyzed and go into real-time decision-making that affects the way the individual can move through the world and what choices it is presented with. Rather than by self-conscious reflection, behavior is conditioned, informed, if not altogether determined by the way the world is presented back to the individual in increasingly immersive and overlapping digital ecosystems. Zuboff uses starkly religious language to describe this functioning of power: "Like gods, these mathematical models were opaque, their workings invisible to all but the highest priests in their domain: mathematicians and computer scientists. Their verdicts, even when wrong or harmful, were beyond dispute or appeal ... inscrutable to all but an exclusive data priesthood."[24]

Data-based predictions are not actually forecasts about individuals, they are stochastic correlations of dividual data, but they can become self-fulfilling prophecies or even be used outright for the purpose of manipulation. If Facebook "knows" you better than you know yourself[25], then Facebook knows what is best for you and is capable of bringing it about. Facebook and Cambridge Analytica's role in the 2016 US presidential elections may demonstrate how controlling omniscience exerts its power over individuals by drawing on dividual data, and not against their wills, but by guiding their wills: microtargetted advertisement allows to design the individual's environment such that it will freely choose what in fact has been chosen for it.[26] Beyond micro-targetting, controlling omniscience fuels many other areas, like search engines[27] or predictive policing[28].

Providence has been conceived of as a subtle and invisible background mechanism rather than sovereign displays of divine power in historical intervention. More unnoticeable, but maybe even more pervasive, everything must—will!—go according to the divine plan. As divine providence, the digital economy's controlling omniscience works in imperceptible, invisible, unfathomable ways, and just as with divine providence, it is all but impossible to exert counter-influence on it. The dividual algorith-

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[24] Ibid.: 81.
[25] Cf. Youyou, Wu et al. 2015.
[26] Cf. Kosinski et al. 2013; Kosinski, Michal et al. 2016.
[27] Cf. Noble 2018.
[28] Cf. McCulloch and Wilson 2017.

mic knowledge may be compared to Luis de Molina's conception of middle knowledge: aware of all possible scenarios, controlling omniscience has preemptively decided which one to bring about.[29] Choices remain free, but which choices should be presented such that an individual will freely choose what it is supposed to, has been "railroaded" on the dividual level. While one remains entirely personally responsible for one's action in secondary causation of events, they are indeed decreed by a primary cause.

Replicating omniscience: A digital theology of creation. Similarly to the relationship between disciplining and performing omniscience, *replicating omniscience* is in some ways an intensification, in other ways an inversion of controlling omniscience, or: its limit function. All four sketched types rely on an intertwinement of power/knowledge—just as the doctrine of God has always understood omniscience to be both a function of omnipotence and its "billet d'entree."[30] In replicating omniscience, however, power becomes deterministic because reality and knowledge become coextensive.

Controlling omniscience, we have said, functions algorithmically, stochastically, it does not in fact override people's will to determine their actions and behavior outright. But, we might ask, is that only due to its in fact less-than-omniscient status, i.e., its lack of data? This indeed is the suspicion of tech-optimists like Chris Anderson, former editor-in-chief of WIRED, who unabashedly envisions an "end of theory"[31] and an completely automatic functioning of power once "complete data" is achieved. This may seem quite obviously hermeneutically naive—and data science at large is indeed much more conscious that there is no such thing as pure and objective "raw" data.[32]

But indeed Anderson's claim opens up ontological questions far beyond the grasp of its author: Is reality ultimately informational, even digital, and thus computable? Is the possibility to be known—and theoretically known completely!—therefore ingrained into the universe, and if so, why? And if not, then why and how *are* we able to make sense of anything at all? Already Konrad Zuse envisioned the universe as being deterministically computed on some sort of giant, but discrete computer.[33]

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[29] Reichel 2019.

[30] Feldmeier and Spieckermann 2011.

[31] Anderson 2008.

[32] Cf. e.g. Doyd and Crawford 2012.

[33] Narrated in Floridi 2011: 317, even as Floridi ends up positing informational structural realism against digital ontology.

While Anderson's vision that we might achieve a point where data will be all in all might sound like a dataistic eschatology, the ontological question reveals the site of theological comparison here to be the conflict between intellectualism and voluntarism, and thus the doctrine of God as well as the understanding of the nature of creation. If God knows all there is, and everything is thus perfectly represented in the mind of God, the mind of God becomes indistinguishable from reality. Is all of reality but a simulation, i.e. a dream of God? Does creation come into being because it is in the mind of God, and therefore has to have reality, or does it have independent reality, and is subsequently perfectly represented in the mind of God because God is omniscient? On the more mundane level a similar ambivalence might ensue: Does data represent reality or does it produce worlds? Do we live in a deterministic or a constructivist reality? How does how we understand the world alter the world? And how might thus datafication very literally be involved in political theology: shaping the world in its image?

4. Reconsidering Omniscience, Theologically

Along with the expansion of the realm of political theology into the digital, we can discern in these four types an expansion of theological loci that inform the digital imaginary: beyond sovereignty, beyond the economy of salvation, we see notions of divine judgment, election, providence, and even creation play out in different aspects of how power operates in the digital—even as this rough sketch does not aim at a comprehensive analysis.

As a political theology of the digital, this analysis thus uncovers conceptual homologies between the theological and the digital, which may partially be systematic, partially be genealogically traceable as influence from one realm to the other. It theorizes technological developments in their larger transformative effects by differentiating them according to differing theo-logics, the doctrinally mappable different ways in which such technologies work towards constructing superhuman knowledge/power, and the ways in which such superhuman knowledge/power interfaces with human subjectivity and agency.

To state the obvious, digital theology is not an "objective" analytic, or more precisely: it is not neutral with regard to the objects it studies. As previous versions of political theology, digital theology participates in a politics of ideas, even as it offers conceptual resources to theorize the digital in its analytic task. It not only generally asserts the relevance of theological thought to the digital despite the latter's secularity, such an

analysis will also provide starting points for theological-ethical assessment and critique of digital logics.

But this is not the only critical task that ensues. Additionally, digital theology prompts a reappraisal of the underlying doctrines. As it was the case with sovereignty, the real-world manifestations of superhuman knowledge challenge the theological notions they draw on. Contemporary techno-political manifestations of superhuman knowledge and its formation or deformation of human freedom, and the violence and injustice they engender might prompt the theologian to ask themself: Is there a need to revise our doctrines of omniscience, or might omniscience even be the adequate conceptualization of God's knowledge in the first place?

As in light of the political-theological developments of the 20th century, theologians may find that theological nuance matters and that the all-quantor may not be the most helpful way to testify to who the Christian God is. Rather than simply maximize knowledge their its conception of God, they may start asking more precise questions about the particularities, the quality and functioning of knowledge in *who* this God is. They may venture that maybe God does not know everything after all, but God knows everything that *this* God needs to know–as with God's power, so God's knowledge cannot be distinguished from, and is merely an expression of who *this* God is and how *this* God relates to the world. Instead of disciplining, performing, controlling, and replicating omniscience, we might thus talk about "justifying knowledge," "redeeming knowledge," "liberating knowledge," and finally, "creative knowledge." But these ideas, too, need to be further developed elsewhere.

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